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# U.S. arms buildup questioned

## Reports: Soviet spending slowed

By James McCartney  
Inquirer Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Reagan's drive for another major increase in military spending — the latest stage of his \$3 trillion, 10-year military buildup — has encountered an unexpected, first-round obstacle on Capitol Hill.

For the first time since Reagan launched his buildup in 1981, several senators and congressmen have begun raising questions about whether the Soviet military buildup has begun to slow — reducing the necessity for continued American increases.

And others have been asking whether military spending by NATO allies, in fact, outstrips military spending by the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact.

If the allies are already spending more than the Warsaw Pact, asked Sen. Sam Nunn (D., Ga.), a respected defense expert, why should the United States continue building at higher rates?

These questions place in doubt the repeated assertions by Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and by Reagan that the major reason for higher U.S. military spending is to respond to the Soviet buildup. The administration has requested \$277.5 billion in military outlays for 1986, an 8.4 percent real increase after allowing for inflation.

The eventual fate of Reagan's entire budget, which would increase military spending while sharply reducing many social programs, will probably rest on how well Weinberger's arguments can be sustained.

All early evidence indicates that both Reagan and Weinberger are in trouble in Congress — but it is difficult to measure how deeply.

A major reason for the administration's troubles is relatively new questions about the extent of the Soviet Union's military buildup and studies comparing NATO and Warsaw Pact military spending.

Two documents that have received little public attention have prompted some of the tough new questioning.

One is an article by Richard Kaufman, a defense specialist on the staff of Congress Joint Economic Committee. It cites CIA studies which report that the much-advertised Soviet military buildup began to slow down around 1976 — but that the slowdown was not discovered by the CIA until 1983.

It has long been known that the Soviet buildup began around 1963 in the wake of Soviet embarrassment about the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and continued for years at the annual rate of about 3 percent after adjusting for inflation.

In an article in the magazine Soviet Economy, published by the Brookings Institution, Kaufman wrote that the CIA had expected the Soviet buildup to continue at the 3 percent

rate. But, he wrote, those estimates were revised in 1983, and the CIA now believes that growth has been "slowed to slightly less than 2 percent" since 1976.

In other words, the CIA estimates suggest, while the Reagan administration has been building up since 1981, the Soviet military growth has been slowing down.

The other document that has attracted attention on Capitol Hill is a House Budget Committee study produced last year, comparing NATO,

Warsaw Pact and Chinese military spending.

According to the study, NATO spending in 1982, the last year for which complete figures are available, came to \$256 billion, compared with \$202 billion by the Warsaw Pact and \$57 billion by China.

The same study put NATO military manpower at 5.8 million, compared with 4.8 million each in the Warsaw Pact nations and China.

A House Armed Services Committee staff expert said NATO spending was believed to be about 30 percent higher than the Warsaw Pact's this year.

Publication of these studies has been accompanied by a change in the leadership of the House Armed Services Committee, one of the most powerful committees in Congress because it holds the purse strings for the military.

Rep. Les Aspin (D., Wis.), 46, once worked at the Pentagon and has specialized in military issues. Aspin has taken over as the committee's chairman from an ailing Rep. Melvin Price (D., Ill.).

"From now on," said one Aspin aide, "the Pentagon is going to have to answer for how it's spending the money. Aspin wants to know why a lot of things have to be done, and what we're getting for our dollars."

Aspin indicated in hearings that he expected to explore in detail the question of the comparative U.S.-Soviet military buildup as the adminis-

tration's military budget was considered by Congress.

Finally, there is widespread skepticism, on the part of both Republicans and Democrats, that continued major increases in military spending can be sustained in light of the looming federal budget deficit.

That skepticism has come even from such defense stalwarts as Sens. Barry Goldwater (R., Ariz.), the new chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and John C. Stennis (D., Miss.), its former chairman.

They, and others, are making the point that the health of the nation's economy may be just as important to the national security as the size of the military budget.